CANON FODDER

As the sun finally sets on the century of cinema, by what criteria do we determine its masterworks?

BY PAUL SCHRADER

Top guns (and dogs): the #1 *The Rules of the Game*

THE RULES OF THE GAME: NOUVELLE EDITION FRANCAISE/THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Metropolis

Sunrise

The Passion of Joan of Arc

City Lights

PREFACE

THE BOOK I DIDN'T WRITE

In March 2003 I was having dinner in London with Faber and Faber's editor of film books, Walter Donohue, and several others when the conversation turned to the current state of film criticism and lack of knowledge of film history in general. I remarked on a former assistant who, when told to look up Montgomery Clift, returned some minutes later asking, "Where is that?" I replied that I thought it was in the Hollywood Hills, and he returned to his search engine.

Yes, we agreed, there are too many films, too much history, for today's student to master. "Someone should write a film version of Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*," a writer from *The Independent* suggested, and "the person who should write it," he said, looking at me, "is you." I looked to Walter, who replied, "If you write it, I'll publish it." And the die was cast.

Faber offered a contract, and I set to work. Following the Bloom model I decided it should be an elitist canon, not populist, raising the bar so high that only a handful of films would pass over. I proceeded to compile a list of essential films, attempting, as best I could, to separate personal favorites from those movies that artistically defined film history. Compiling was the easy part—then came the first dilemma: why was I selecting these films? What were my criteria?

What is a canon? It is, by definition, based on criteria that transcend taste, personal and popular. The more I pondered this, the more I realized how ignorant I was. How could I formulate a film canon without knowing the history of canon formation?

This sent me back to school. Following the example of then–*New York* magazine critic David Denby, I contacted Columbia University (where I'd taught) and asked to audit relevant courses. Over 2004–2005 I took two classes in the history of aesthetics taught by Lydia Goehr and another in the history of film aesthetics by James Schamus (the same James Schamus who is CEO of Focus Features).

Rather than refine my thoughts, these courses expanded them. I became interested not only in the history of the canon, but also in the history of Aesthetics, the history of Art, and, by extension, the history of Ideas. I felt as if I were trapped in an out-of-control reverse zoom. I began by looking at the hand of the sleeping man in Charles Eames's *Powers of Ten* and ended up in theoretical outer space.

The demise of the canon was tied to the demise of high culture, the demise of high culture to the demise of commonly accepted standards—and the demise of accepted standards led to questions about "the end of Art."

I kept returning to Hegel's insight that the philosophy of Aesthetics is the history of Aesthetics. That is, the definition, the essence of Aesthetics, is nothing more or less than its history. The philosophy of Aesthetics equals the mutation of the Aesthetic Ideal—understand the mutation, you understand Aesthetics. By extension, the philosophy of Religion is the history of Religion, and so forth.

Aesthetics, like the canon, is a narrative. It has a beginning, middle, and end. To understand the canon is to understand its narrative. Art is a narrative. Life is a narrative. The universe is a narrative. To understand the universe is to understand its history. Each and every thing is part of a story—beginning, middle, and end.

The much-debated "end of Art" is not the end of painting and sculpture (they abound), but the closing of the plastic arts' narrative. Life is full of ends; species die or become outmoded. There are still horses, but the horse's role in transportation has come to an end. Likewise movies. We're making horseshoes.

I saw where this line of thinking was leading and followed it there. It led to the writings of Ray Kurzweil (*The Singularity Is Near*), Joel Garreau (*Radical Evolution*), and Jeff Hawkins (*On Intelligence*). Art, religion, psychology are subsets of a larger narrative—the story of *Homo sapiens*, which in turn is a subset of the narrative of planet life, a subset of the narrative of our planet, our universe. All with beginnings, middles, and ends—at an ever-accelerating pace.

I agree with Kurzweil that humankind is on an evolutionary cusp. We can foresee both the end of the 20,000-year reign of *Homo sapiens* and the beginnings of the life-forms that will replace it (something Kurzweil and Garreau predict will happen in the next hundred years). Art looks to the future; it is society's harbinger. The demise of Art's human narrative is not a sign of creative bankruptcy. It's the twinkling of changes to come. Such thoughts fill me not with despair but envy: I wish I could be there to see the curtain rise.

What then to make of my film contract with Faber? Being the dutiful Calvinist I was raised, I soldiered forward, writing an introductory chapter that discussed the history of the canon and setting forth criteria for the film canon. The fact that movies were in decline, I reasoned, was all the more

METROPOLIS: UFA/KOBAL; *SUNRISE*: FOX FILMS/KOBAL; *THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC*: SOCIETE GENERALE DE FILMS/KOBAL; *CITY LIGHTS*: UNITED ARTISTS/KOBAL

The Rules of the Game

Citizen Kane

The Lady Eve

The Third Man

reason to define and defend the film canon. In fact, it was only as I was approaching the end of the introduction that I comprehended the full scope of what I was arguing.

When it came time to delineate the films and filmmakers, chapter by chapter, I found my heart was no longer in it. My foray into futurism had diminished my appetite for archivalism. I abandoned the project (I'd wisely placed Faber's commencement fee in escrow). It's a worthy project; let someone else do it. In deference to the time I invested, I'm including, at the end of this essay, a list of the films I'd planned to include in the film canon.

I've always been interested in films that address the contemporary situation. Historical films interest me more as history than art. I have, perhaps, 10 years of films left in me, and I'm perfectly content to ride the broken-down horse called movies into the cinematic sunset. But if I were starting out (at the beginning of my narrative, so to speak), I doubt I'd turn to films as defined by the 20th century for personal expression.

What can be gleaned from this adventure? If Walter Donohue asks you to dinner in London, think twice.

INTRODUCTION

MOVIES ARE SO 20TH CENTURY

"Critics have found me narrow."—F.R. LEAVIS

MOTION PICTURES WERE THE DOMINANT ART FOR the 20th century. Movies were the center of social mores, fashion and design, politics—in short, at the center of culture—and, in so being, dictated the terms of their dominance to the other art forms: literature, theater, and painting were all redefined by their relationship to cinema. Movies have owned the 20th century.

It will not be so in the 21st century. Cultural and technological forces are at work that will change the concept of "movies" as we have known them. I don't know if there will be a dominant art form in this century, and I'm not sure what form audiovisual media will take, but I am certain movies will never regain the prominence they enjoyed in the last century.

It's an appropriate time, then, to look back on the past 100 years of narrative cinema. The "great middle" of film criticism has fallen shallow; each year more and more of film writing falls into one of two polar categories: populist, epitomized by the "people's choice" approach to film, or academic, epitomized by jargon and extra-filmic considerations. It is no longer possible for a young filmgoer to watch the history of film and make up his or her own mind: there are just too many movies. It's barely possible to keep up with the yearly output of audiovisual entertainment on TV and in theaters, here and abroad. Like book readers, filmgoers must rely on the accumulated wisdom of film studies—which films have endured and why—a "wisdom" increasingly polluted by populist or academic criteria. What is needed, disingenuously enough, is a film canon.

The notion of a canon, any canon—literary, musical, painting—is 20th-century heresy. A film canon is particularly problematic because the demise of the literary canon coincides, not coincidentally, with the advent and rise of moving pictures. There is much debate about the canons but no agreement. Not only is there no agreement about what a canon should include, there's no agreement about whether there should be canons at all. Or, if there is agreement, it is this: canons are bad—elitist, sexist, racist, outmoded, and politically incorrect.

Yet de facto film canons exist—in abundance. They exist in college curriculums, they exist in yearly 10-best lists, they exist in best-of-all-time lists of every sort. Canon formation has become the equivalent of 19th-century anti-sodomy laws: repudiated in principle, performed in practice. Canons exist because they serve a function; they are needed. And the need increases with each new wave of films. What I propose is to go back in order to go forward. To examine the history of canon formation, cherry-pick the criteria that best apply to film, and select a list of films that meet the highest criteria.

The model, of course, is Harold Bloom's 1994 bestseller, *The Western Canon*. Mustering a mountain of hubris and a lifetime of close reading, Bloom proposed a canon of Western literature: books and authors who meet the highest "artistic criteria." *The Western Canon* is also a screed against "the cultural politics, both of the Left and the Right, that are destroying criticism and consequently may destroy literature itself." These cultural politicians, whom Bloom dubs "The School of Resentment," count among their number Feminists, Marxists, Afrocentrists, New Historicists, Lacanians, Deconstructionists, and Semioticians (Bloom doesn't flinch from making enemies). Film studies' subordination to these "isms" hasn't reached the grotesque proportions Bloom speaks of, but it's catching up. Film departments abound with resentful academics. Film is not literature, of course, and the issues involved, though similar, are not the same. The greatest difference is that there is still a debate about whether motion pictures are art at all.

THE RULES OF THE GAME: NOUVELLE EDITION FRANCAISE/KOBAL; *THE LADY EVE*: PARAMOUNT/KOBAL/G.E. RICHARDSON

Orphée

An American in Paris

The Life of Oharu

Tokyo Story

II.

TRASH, ART AND THE MOVIES

What better place to start than with the most influential article in the history of film criticism, Pauline Kael's 1969 essay "Trash, Art and the Movies." (A 1999 NYU survey of the top 100 works of 20th-century journalism listed this essay as number four—yet another example of how canon formation has infiltrated every aspect of contemporary life.) Kael's polemic, a defense of art as entertainment, influenced a generation of film critics and, subsequently, a generation of filmmakers. The piece was heady, invigorating stuff in 1969, an artillery barrage aimed at the East Coast critical establishment, the armchair newspaper moralists, and self-appointed arbiters of high art. Rereading Kael's essay after 35 years I find it not only wrong-headed but deleterious. It remains a hugely influential essay, now for negative reasons.

The underlying assumption of "Trash, Art and the Movies" is that motion pictures are a lower form of art ("a tawdry corrupt art for a tawdry corrupt world") or, perhaps, not a form of art at all. "Movies took their impetus not from the desiccated European high culture, but from the peep show, the Wild West show, the music hall, the comic strip—from what was coarse and common." Movies were, bless their heart, trash. Directors such as Kubrick (*2001*) and Antonioni (*Blow-Up*) were accused of "using 'artistic techniques' to give trash the look of art." A sow's ear is a sow's ear, and anyone who talks of purses is pretentious and just plain phony. "When you clean them up, when you make movies respectable, you kill them."

"Does trash corrupt?" Kael asked. No, she responds, "they may poison us collectively though they don't injure us personally" (huh?). We enjoy movies; we use them to grow up. "If we make any kind of decent, useful life for ourselves we have less need to run from it to those diminishing pleasures of the movies." So there you have it. Movies are fun, corrupt, and juvenile, and decent, useful people outgrow them. She concludes her essay with the statement, "Trash has given us an appetite for art."

Wrong. Trash does corrupt. Trash doesn't give one an appetite for art any more than Big Macs give one an appetite for healthy cuisine. And trash has won the day. Later in life, after she'd retired, Kael confided to David Denby that she hadn't realized that "everything would be trash." In the name of common sense and proletarian taste Kael attacked the wall of High Culture—and the walls came tumbling down. What in 1969 seemed like a breath of fresh air was actually the stench of trash to come.

Cut to the "Postart" cinema exemplified by Quentin Tarantino and his imitators. (I find Allan Kaprow's term more descriptive than the more widely used and confusing "postmodern.") *Kill Bill* is the apotheosis of Kael's movies-as-trash ideology. Movies are assemblages of pop culture; the only criterion is "fun." Is it fun? Is it cool? Is it hip? There's no distinction between high and low, genuine and ersatz, existential or ironic, melancholy and parody, Shakespeare and Stephen King, *Children of Paradise* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*—all that matters is how you put them together. (It's been said assemblage is the art form of the 20th century and Joseph Cornell its Godfather. If so, Tarantino is its Michael Corleone.) And whatever you do, don't pretend it has any meaning beyond the moment. Sensation replaces sentiment.

It's ironic that Kael lists comic books as one of the impetuses for movies because comic-book heroes, comic-book stories, and comic-book situations, once regarded as disreputable, have become prestige fare. The moral scolds have been run from the ranks of film reviewers (and onto the op-ed pages). The academics Kael derided for treating Hitchcock and von Sternberg as artists are applying their analytical skills to *The Matrix* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Hitchcock and von Sternberg start to look pretty good in this post–"Trash, Art and the Movies" culture.

Studio executives who once felt obliged to produce a certain number of "prestige" or "quality" films have been replaced by corporate CEOs who can't be bothered. If there is no stigma attached to trash, why attempt anything more demanding? Kael set in motion the legitimization of trash: ideas float obliquely through culture, and once that idea took root—with critics, with filmmakers, with financiers, with audiences—there was no turning back. Kael was writing during the most artistically vibrant era of film's short history. I don't think she imagined that trash would actually prevail. She's become, unwittingly, the Victor Frankenstein of film criticism.[1]

In retrospect, Kael's attempt to judge movies as trash seems yet another in a series of 20th-century attempts to avoid judging art, particularly popular art, as "art." If movies are trash, they can be good and bad trash, neatly avoiding all

ORPHÉE: ANDRE PAULVE/FILMS DU PALAIS ROYAL/KOBAL; *AN AMERICAN IN PARIS:* MGM/KOBAL; *TOKYO STORY:* SHOCHIKU/KOBAL

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The Searchers

Sweet Smell of Success

Vertigo

Pickpocket

that inconvenient controversy about low and high art through a redefinition of terms.

But movies are not by definition trash. If anything, they are by definition art (the dictionary definition, "the products of human creativity," seems as good as any) and can even be, on rare occasions, high art. And what is high art? That question brings the discussion back to the canon. Any time a qualitative adjective is used ("better," "more integral," "purer"), a canon is implied. If art objects are to be compared qualitatively they can be ranked; if they can be ranked, there must be a canon.

III.
THE RISE OF THE CANON

CANON WAS ORIGINALLY A RELIGIOUS TERM AND its use in the context of art coincides with the shift from religious to secular art. Canon, from the Latin *canon*, or "rule," was an ecclesiastical code of law or standard of judgment, usually based on canonical books, such as the Scriptures. The canonical books were those included in the Bible. The concept of the secular canon, the art canon, did not appear until the 18th century, as the Enlightenment gave way to Romanticism.

For the Greeks and Romans art was rational and implied knowledge ("the ability to execute something with apt comprehension," per Aristotle); science and crafts were included among the arts. What today is known as Art was for the ancients *techne*, technique. The most accepted classification, by Galen, was between "liberal" and "vulgar" arts. The liberal (intellectual) arts included geometry and astronomy. The vulgar (manual) arts included painting and architecture. Poetry and music weren't art at all, but forms of rhetoric. The ancients never faced the possibility that fine arts could form a distinct group of arts. Plotinus, in the third century, devised a five-tiered classification of the arts, beginning with the mechanical (architecture) and ending with the cerebral (geometry), codifying the classical hierarchy—from body to mind, material to spiritual.

Art fell into the province of church orthodoxy during the Middle Ages. Dante can be said to have invented the idea of the canonical, but the categories enumerated in *The Divine Comedy* owed more to prophecy than analysis. The Church changed the intent of classification but not its nature. Art, according to Aquinas, was the "ordering of reason," and reason was required to accept God's revelation. The seven liberal arts were the arts of reason: logic, rhetoric, grammar, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The "vulgar" arts, now called "mechanical," were governed by fixed rules and guilds. Renaissance thinkers as well accepted Galen's classification, even as the general appreciation of architecture, painting, music, and poetry increased (Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* dates from 1550). The fine arts were being redefined in practice, though not in principle. During the 17th century, a time during which the intellectual center of Europe moved from Rome to Paris, the natural sciences were emancipated from theology, resulting in a clear distinction between the arts and sciences.

The 18th century, emboldened by Enlightenment philosophy and the rise of the bourgeoisie, emancipated the arts (a thesis developed by Paul Kristeller in the Fifties). In 1746 Charles Batteux proposed a system of fine arts that share the common principle of imitating nature. The beaux arts—the first such use of that phrase—were music, poetry, painting, drama, and dance. Montesquieu, in an essay written for the *Encyclopédie* (1775), takes the term "fine arts" for granted. In 1735 Alexander Baumgarten coined the term "aesthetics." In 1768 German philologist David Ruhnaken made the first analogy between the classical and the scriptural canon. In 1765 Johann Winckelmann wrote *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, followed by *The History of Ancient Art* in 1784—art history had become a secular discipline. The first public museum of art opened in lower Saxony in 1754; the Royal Academy followed in 1769.

Secular arts needed secular institutions. The concert hall served the function of the cathedral, the art academy the seminary. With the rise of Romanticism, Kant became the new Augustine, and artists were elevated to the role of secular priests. All that was needed was a canon.

The first art canons were literary and British. (In the 18th century belles lettres had migrated, against the protests of Goethe and others, into the field of beaux arts.) As early as 1580, symbols of laureate status began to adorn the portraits of English poets; in 1616 Charles I appointed Ben Jonson Poet Laureate (the same year Jonson, in the publication of his *Workes*, claimed classic status for his plays). The driving force behind the creation of an English literary canon was Joseph Addison. Through his articles in *The Spectator*, Addison relentlessly advocated the role of critics in establishing standards of taste and hierarchies of judgment. In 1694 he published his own canon, "An Account of the Greatest Literary Poets," listing in

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Last Year at Marienbad

La Notte

Jules and Jim

8 1/2

verse the major poets from Chaucer to Dryden. Joseph Warton went a step further in 1756 when he ranked English poets by "four different classes and degrees." Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were included in Warton's first rank, followed by (the now forgotten) Thomas Otway and Nathaniel Lee.

The heyday of the canon was the heyday of criticism. Although there were art critics and historians throughout Europe, no one took as enthusiastically to the notion of the canon as the Victorians and, among the Victorians, none more than Matthew Arnold. A poet as well as a critic, Arnold called for the promotion of "the best which has been thought and said in the world." (He also, appropriately enough, envisioned the day when art would replace religion.) Although Arnold (echoing Kant) famously called for "disinterested" criticism, the canons that emerged in the 19th century were anything but. The Victorian literary canon resonated with Empire and entitlement. It was incumbent on British critics as representatives of the world's greatest power and intellectual center to define and codify the masterpieces of Western art and literature. John Ruskin and Walter Pater, each in his own way, contributed to the enshrinement of the critic as the Definer and Defender of the canon.

Most canons were literary. Critics are, after all, writers, and it's easier to write about literature and ideas than it is to write about shapes and sounds—and easier, as well, to enforce orthodoxy. Canons of all sorts existed (music had "repertoires," visual arts had "masterpieces"), but for the most part, when one thinks of the Western canon one thinks of the literary canon. The first canon to be so marketed was literary: in 1910 Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, supervised the selection and publication of the "great company of the wisest, wittiest, most interesting minds of all ages." One of Eliot's stated motives was the same as the one that begins this essay: there were just too many books for any one person to read.[2] The Harvard Classics institutionalized as well the now common squabbling about canon inclusion/exclusion—*Two Years Before the Mast* and not *Moby-Dick*?

In the disillusionment following World War I and the collapse of Britain's dream of empire, New Criticism, spearheaded by T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards, sought to define the canon by textual analysis, a movement that led to elitist canons such as F.R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (46) and Frank Kermode's *The Classic* (75). These were the glory days of the canon; they were also the dying days. Despite the best efforts of the New Critics, Bloom's School of Resentment had come ashore.

IV.
THE FALL OF THE CANON

In the mid-18th century, technology and a liberated bourgeoisie necessitated a new classification of art, fine art, and a canon ensued; scarcely 200 years later, in the mid-20th century, the same forces combined to banish the canon and bring the very notion of fine arts into question. Those who tremble when they hear phrases like "the end of Art," "the death of the author," and "Postart" would do well to remember that what is being talked about is not the death of works of art or even art but the demise of a tradition, one that is only 200 years old.

The concept of fine arts in general and the canon in particular were based on a series of assumptions that were called into question in the 20th century. These included, firstly, *the assumption that the fine arts were a closed system*. Kant argued that there were three kinds of fine arts: those using plastic images, words, or tones. From these categories derived an increasingly static list of the beaux arts: painting, sculpture, architecture, and music. This was the formative canon of fine arts from which other canons evolved. It took generations to establish this hierarchy, and it appeared to be fixed. In the 20th century, the new arts of technology—photography and motion pictures—threw this classification into disarray. Photography, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, destroyed the conventional boundaries of art. The new technologies of transmission, recorded music, and radio, further blurred the boundaries (John Philip Sousa predicted recording would lead to the demise of music). The technological assault on the fine arts canon triggered a crumbling from within. Twelve-tone music, abstract painting, performance art, and the journalistic novel questioned the definition of the previously established arts. Critics who in the past would have defended the fine arts were hard-pressed to define any notion of art.

Second: *the distinction between fine arts and applied arts*. The age-old dispute between liberal and vulgar arts was revived by the Arts and Crafts movement. At the end of the 19th century, William Morris argued that there can be no nobler art than good craft. (This too can be seen as driven by technology, in this case a reaction against technology.) Science also demanded reevaluation: weren't Einstein's theories, in fact, art? Just because a thing is useful, does that mean it can't be

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High and Low

The Leopard

The Battle of Algiers

Masculin-Feminin

art? If not, should a canon also include practical arts? The expanding empire of Art not only annexed neighboring territories like arts and crafts, it attacked and incorporated states thought firmly under the control of "reality"—states such as politics, commerce, and the quotidian. The new lifelikeness of art created an awareness of the "art"ificial quality of life. What began as Dada happenings expanded to include the nonfiction novel, conceptual theater, and fictional documentaries. Reality television isn't a fad or passing craze but the natural result of the ever-expanding definition of art. What's an advocate of the canon to do in this "Life: The Movie" world? If you can't draw the line at practical crafts, how can you exclude 9/11, the most influential theater piece of our era?[3]

Third: *the quasi-religious nomenclature of fine arts*. The art world[4] liberated itself from the constrictions of the Church but not from the conventions of religious terminology. The notion of "high art" was not unlike that of the "high church," the art canon not dissimilar to the scriptural canon, and the hagiographies of artists from those of saints and martyrs—all of which left the notion of high arts vulnerable to the attacks of Marx and his followers. "Cultural capital" is just another form of material capital and, like material capital, is created to control the means of production and disempower the "lower" classes. Selection presupposes exclusion. In the past century canon selection has become, in the mind of Marxist critics, synonymous with the exclusion of artists for reasons of class, gender, or race. As the arts have become more democratic and populist, the notion of high art has become less and less defensible. The bourgeoisie who had done so much to free the arts from church control found themselves the victims of their own social and religious prejudices. The concepts of fine art and the canon were formulated in such a way as to require repudiation.

Fourth, *the relationship of art and Beauty*. From its inception the notion of fine arts was tied to the concept of Beauty. Batteaux, who coined the term beaux arts, defined the fine arts as arts "concerned with Beauty or which appealed to taste." This notion of Beauty was derived not from the Greeks (who perceived Beauty as excellence), but from the Middle Ages that defined Beauty as the expression of God in the universe. As argued before, the new aestheticians of the Enlightenment secularized art but not its terminology. The entwined relationship of art and Beauty did not survive into the 20th century. "Art," Picasso wrote in 1935, "is not the application of a canon of Beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon." Art was instead expression. The common and the unpleasant had an equal claim to be art. In the old order, the strictures of Beauty (proportionality, clarity, etc.) were enforceable; the art canon could be legislated. Expression, however, could not be defined or enforced; without enforcement, the canon resembled not law but a list of personal preferences.

Fifth: *mechanical reproducibility—Walter Benjamin's paradigm shift*. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), Walter Benjamin attempted to situate traditional art and aesthetics in the context of the new technologies of recording, photography, and motion pictures: "The difficulties which photography caused traditional aesthetics were mere child's play as compared to those raised by film." Benjamin argued that reproducibility removed the unique "aura" of a work of art. Mechanical reproduction displaced the traditional aesthetic values of "authenticity," "permanence," and "uniqueness": what was authentic can be replicated, what was unique became the common property of many, and what was permanent proved transitory and reversible. One doesn't have to be Matthew Arnold to realize the ramifications of this paradigm shift. Authenticity, uniqueness, and permanence constituted, along with Beauty, the critical building blocks of the canon.

And sixth: *the notion of art as force for social good*. An underlying assumption, from Aristotle to Adorno, is that art plays a positive role in society. It enlightens, ennobles, improves. Good art makes for good citizens. Aesthetics and ethics don't make good bedfellows (in fact, they don't even sleep well alone), but even Kant, who contended art should be free of social consideration, also viewed beauty as a symbol of the morally good. The connection between art and social good, always contestable, was irrevocably broken by the rise of National Socialism. "After Auschwitz" became a catchphrase of 20th-century art criticism. "After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric," declared Theodor Adorno. How could Germany, birthplace of Kant, Goethe, and Beethoven, have created the culture of Hitler and Goebbels? The shadow of William Furtwangler conducting Beethoven's Ninth for an audience of sympathetic Nazi party officials hangs over the 20th century—and the concept of the canon. What function does an art canon serve after Auschwitz? Half a century later, the "After Auschwitz" debate continues as a contest between fiction and nonfiction. The horror of Auschwitz was not simply the shock of "civilized atrocity"; it was the shock of atrocity vividly and immediately documented in photographs and film. How can fictional stories compete with instant media? "After Auschwitz" has become "After Vietnam," "After 9/11," etc.

HIGH AND LOW: TOHO/KOBAL; *THE LEOPARD*: TITANUS/SNPC/KOBAL; *BATTLE OF ALGIERS*: CASBAH/IGOR/KOBAL; *MASCULIN-FEMININ*: ANOUCHKA/ARGOS/SANDREWS/KOBAL

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Persona

2001: A Space Odyssey

The Wild Bunch

The Conformist

It's not so much the case that there are no 20th-century canons (canons have in fact proliferated since the "death of the canon," either as classroom curricula or "best of" lists) as it is the fact that few in the art world take them seriously. It's part and parcel of the notion of a film canon that it not only be established but also defended, and, in the last century, critics spent far more time attacking the notion of the canon than defending it. Without defenders the canon becomes a matter of convenience (curricula) or taste (favorite films).

V.
THE RISE OF THE NONJUDGMENTALS

THE DEMISE OF THE CANON WAS NOT AN ISOLATED event; in fact it was hardly noticed amid the larger collapse of the High Art Establishment. Art values have always been sunk in the shifting sands: religion in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, human knowledge and perfectability during the Enlightenment, emotion in the Romantic era, the unconscious during the Modern era. Each era overturns its predecessor. Just as Enlightenment values rebutted religious criteria, Romanticism refuted Enlightenment precepts, and Moderns refuted Romantic sensation, so, in Postmodernism and Postart, technology counters the unconscious. Postart is post-unconscious art. "Caught in these shifting sands, The Art Establishment, which had sought definition progressively through religion, knowledge, emotion, and the unconscious, is inundated by technological 'values.'"[5]

Modernism = unconscious? Modernist works, in fact, are carefully crafted.

The icons of 20th-century art are the urinal and the Brillo box. Duchamp's urinal (like other readymades) posits art outside all criteria. All art is equal; all art is artifact. Perhaps Duchamp's greatest achievement, Donald Kuspit writes in *The End of Art*, "is the discrediting and undermining of the aesthetic." Andy Warhol's Brillo box took the next step, replacing Duchamp's lack of criteria with money. Duchamp conflated art and non-art; Warhol melded art and money. Money (and fame) is the last objective measure of an art object's worth. If art is money, then great art is big money and a great artist is a great businessman, or "Art businessman," as Warhol called himself. "Art," Marshall McLuhan said, "is what you can get away with."

What's an art critic to do? What's an academic to do? How does one evaluate art objects in an aesthetic void?[6] Are critics to be the new CPAs in Art Business World? And what about those proliferating canons?

Academics and critics who were uneasy with the "everything is art" dictum, repelled by the notion that "art is business," and equally uncomfortable with evaluating art works purely on the basis of personal preference, searched out new means to study and evaluate art. Bloom lumps many of these scholars into the School of Resentment, but I think these modern-day Schoolmen are part of a larger aesthetic movement, The Rise of the Nonjudgmentals. The Nonjudgmentals have devised schemes by which art could be closely studied and analyzed without prejudice—the prejudice, that is, of having to determine if the art work is good or bad vis-à-vis another work of art (as if we still know what good and bad is!).

The Nonjudgmentals fall into several categories. The foremost are the (1) *pleaders of special causes*: minority, gender, and cultural studies. Black Studies, Latino, Feminist, Gay, etc. By separating a select group of art works from the larger Dead White Male panorama, a critic can study the works as part of a subset, evaluating them by how they function in the subset. These are fascinating and important studies; they have the added benefit of freeing the critic from having to pass judgment. (An irony of attackers of the DWM canon is that, having freed themselves of the Western tradition and its implied qualifications, the special causes of Nonjudgmentals proceed to set up alternative canons: black, Latino, feminist, gay, etc.) The same holds true of genre and cultural studies: westerns, pulp novels, British theater, Indian cinema. Careers and academic departments have been built around fields of interest that free the scholar from passing judgment. Culture in this case really means subculture, and, in studying these subcultural art works, the critic examines their relationship to the larger culture rather than their comparative value. (2) *Formal and semantic scholars*. At the same time as Duchamp was using his readymades to undermine the aesthetic, Wittgenstein was contending that aesthetics was not really a proper subject for study at all. If the artistic value of an art work lay not in the work but in how we perceive it, as Wittgenstein contended, then the proper study of art is the study of how we experience it. Words that "hardly play any role at all," words such as "beautiful," "fine," "excellent," should be quarantined. Although Wittgenstein wrote little specifically about the arts, the assumption of his analytical philosophy was that aesthetics, like philosophy, should be reduced to logic: aesthetics was

PERSONA: SVENSK FILMINDUSTRI/KOBAL; *2001*: MGM/KOBAL; *THE CONFORMIST*: MARS/MARIANNE/MARAN/KOBAL

Performance

The Godfather

Taxi Driver

That Obscure Object of Desire

an investigation into the sentences we utter when we speak about art. (Seen from an artist's perspective, it beggars the imagination that such an idea—art as logic—ever took hold.) Analytical philosophy legitimized the nascent semantic studies begun by Saussure that led to a hydra-headed proliferation of disciplines: Logical Positivism, Logical Atomism, Semantics, Semiotics, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction. I have no intention (or desire) to wade into this internecine battlefield, but simply to point out that these formalist strategies share a similar impulse: to view art nonjudgmentally. (3) *Proponents of art as cultural phenomenon.* Marxism, the first paradigm to fill the void left by the collapse of 19th-century aesthetics, was followed by several others: Psychoanalysis, Materialism, and New Historicism (as well as gender and minority studies to the extent that they expand from subcultural to cultural). Beneath these cultural paradigms flow the archaic Platonic and Aristotelian notion of art as social medicine—stripped clean of moralizing Platonic and Aristotelian values. Art is the product of social forces, economic, political, technological, etc., and the proper study of art is the study of those forces. And, lastly, as mentioned before, the evil twins of (4) *money and fame* hover above them all as the ultimate of nonjudgmental criteria. It is interesting to note that as film moved into its Postmodern phase the interest in film economics increased: box office became increasingly popular as the only indisputable measure of a motion picture's value.

By the close of the 20th century, many of these disciplines had lost their fervor or fallen from vogue—yet there was nothing to replace them. David Bordwell, one of the most astute contemporary film scholars, argued in 1996 that "Grand Theories" have been detrimental to film studies and what is now needed is "middle-level research" (genres, national cinemas, business aspects, etc.). The collapse of the Aesthetic and the resulting rise of the Nonjudgmentals were complete.

VI.
FILM VERSUS THE CANON

HERE THEN IS THE PROBLEM: HOW CAN YOU HAVE A film canon when the very existence of motion pictures played a decisive role in the collapse of the canon?

Any attempt to "place" motion pictures in the art canon must circle back, at some point, to Benjamin. It was Benjamin who was one of the first to confront the issue of photographic representation in the arts—and the resulting complications. Before photography, images were products of human artistry; after photography, images were the by-products of technology. A great deal of intellectual effort was spent trying to justify the artistic quality of photographs (choice of composition, lighting, film stock, etc.), but the fact remained that a machine or a monkey was as capable of creating a photographic image as a human.

Benjamin's writings reveal a deep ambivalence about cinema. Movies returned storytelling to the masses (a positive thing); on the other hand, cinema's industrial status made it susceptible to manipulation for political purposes (problematic). Movies freed images from their literary masters, but mass replication of images thrust them beyond anyone's control. Movies stripped art of its aura, but dispersed the aura in the mass culture of capitalism. Over and over Benjamin simultaneously holds out then retracts the value of technologically produced images.

How then can Benjamin help reconcile the disparity between motion pictures and the idea of a canon? Benjamin was no friend of the canon and had he outlived WWII he might, like fellow members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, and Siegfried Krakauer, have turned against motion pictures, consigning them to the status of "fetish" commodities of consumer culture. Benjamin, however, was not a rigid theorist. He has been described as a flaneur, a window-shopper in the world of 20th-century ideas, and one of his many casual insights can, I believe, be used to develop a film canon: the notion that motion pictures were not so much an art form as they were a transitional phase.

In *The Image in Dispute*, Dudley Andrew contends that Benjamin addressed not only the issues of aura, mechanical reproducibility, artistic fascism, and fetishism but also the "transitional nature of cinema." Motion pictures are but a way station in the cavalcade of art history, a stopover en route from 19th-century written narrative to the 21st-century world of synthetic images and sounds. "The century of cinema," Andrew writes, "offered a fragile period of détente during which the logosphere of the 19th century with its grand novels and histories has slowly given way—under the pressure of technology, of the ascendance of the image, and of unfathomable world crises—to the videosphere we are now entering, where, we have been

PERFORMANCE: WARNER/GOODTIMES/KOBAL; THE GODFATHER: PARAMOUNT/KOBAL; TAXI DRIVER: COLUMBIA/KOBAL

All That Jazz

The Dead

Mother and Son

In the Mood for Love

assured, neither grand narratives nor the genius of creativity can be said any longer to function." A bit extreme, perhaps, but, to my mind, very much to the point. Andrew locates the defining moment of the century of cinema in the Nouvelle Vague (specifically *Jules and Jim*), the moment when old-fashioned narrative bent to modernist storytelling. The century of cinema is the beginning, middle, and end of Modernism.

The future of audiovisual entertainment (I hesitate to use the term "motion pictures") will be determined by technology. The technical means of capturing, producing, and distributing moving images has always defined the "art" in film art. The nickelodeon determined a certain type of cinema, as did the process of projecting images across a darkened room—as did television. The art of audiovisual storytelling has been redefined by every technological innovation: sound stage, crane, color, widescreen, high-speed film, radio microphone, video camera, Steadicam, digital editing, digital images. The movies have never stopped morphing. Technology has defined the art of film as much as its social context. The current uncertainty about the nature of cinema—and its future—cannot be resolved by artists or financiers; technology will accomplish that task. Audiovisual entertainment will emerge from this uncertain era only when a new paradigm of production, replication, and distribution is in place. The new face of film will be the face most appropriate to this technology. Will motion pictures be downloaded on demand? Will they be seen on cell phones and wraparound headsets? Will it be possible to re-edit pre-existing material as one watches it? Will viewers be able to select parts of existing films (chase sequences, etc.)? Will we live in a world of constant, multiple 24/7 video streams? All of this seems entirely likely. These new technologies will dictate what "film" is to become.

The fact that the century of cinema is but a transitional phase provides a context for the creation of this canon. Since it's an educational necessity to have a canon (in order to create a curriculum), and since the urge to create best-of lists will not be repressed by any amount of critical logic, why not compile a list that acknowledges film's unique transitory position? There are, it seems to me, two conditions under which one can justify a film canon: (1) by evaluating movies in the context of the century of cinema, a transitional moment; and (2) by embracing a multiplicity of aesthetic criteria.

VII.

REFURBISHED CRITERIA FOR A FILM CANON

Cinema is not so much a new art form as a reformulation of existing art forms; likewise the criteria for a cinema canon are reformulations of the historical criteria used to evaluate pre-existing art forms. These historical criteria are renewed when seen through the prism of cinema's "transitional" development and the multiplicity of aesthetic criteria.

The Nonjudgmentals retreated from the canon because mechanically reproducible art didn't fit historical methods of judgment. A new criteria for a film canon would regard just those indigestible elements, its "inauthenticity" for example, as defining attributes—as in, for example, "to what extent does a given film interpret the evolving concept of mass art?" Similarly, the multiplicity of aesthetic criteria opens films up to interdisciplinary study. The answer to the old paradox "writing about music is like dancing about architecture" is: exactly. Of course language itself limits how we can "speak" about moving pictures, but that doesn't mean one needs to evaluate all movies as literature. The varying criteria used for theater, painting, architecture, sculpture, music, literature, and dance all apply to film. Some films are best seen through a literary prism (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), some through an architectural prism (*L'Eclisse*). A sliding scale of multiple aesthetics is not the same as no scale at all, nor is it an acceptable excuse to avoid making judgments. It will result in some awkward comparisons (is *Virginia Woolf* better as literature than *L'Eclisse* is as architecture?), but aren't such conundrums the business—or at least the fun—of criticism?

What are the film canon's "refurbished" criteria? That, as always, is the rub. Jonathan Rosenbaum recently published a collection of essays, *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons*, in which he discusses hundreds of films, describing many as "classics." Yet, for the life of me, I've been unable to discover the criteria by which he culls these films. It's much easier to make lists than to explain why. When you logically resolve Kant's contradiction—if there are judgments of taste, some judgments must be true and some false, resulting in criteria[7]—you descend into a purgatory of shifting "sentiments." This, scholars tell us, was the fallacy of David Hume. I'm not so sure.

ALL THAT JAZZ: 20TH CENTURY FOX/COLUMBIA/KOBAL; *THE DEAD*: VESTRON-ZENITH/KOBAL; *MOTHER AND SON*: SEVERNY FOND/O-FILM/KOBAL

Standards of taste, as Hume understood, do not restrict art; the work of art will always find a way around the rules. They do, however, establish a necessary framework for judgment. I'd like to posit five criteria upon which to base a film canon. Seven may be too many or too few, but it's a beginning, and what better criterion to begin with than the oldest and most vexing: Beauty.

Beauty. The 20th-century flight from the canon coincides with the flight from the concept of Beauty. The last apologists for Beauty, Santayana and Croce, were pre-cinema; last century, under the influence of Wittgenstein, aestheticians disparaged the attempt to find essential qualities of art. Beauty was seen less as a universal value and more as a function of pleasure, an association that led, in the extreme, to the trivialization of Beauty, as in the statement "it was so beautiful" implying less than substantial. Picasso and Pollack would have argued that their art was meant not "simply" to give pleasure but to overwhelm, to change the world. Beauty, in such a context, seemed not only trivial but banal.

Yet Beauty is the bedrock of all judgments of taste, as Kant knew well, and without a respect for Beauty judgments topple in the winds of fashion. The solution to the problem of Beauty is not to deny Beauty its power but to expand its parameters. The rehabilitation of the concept of Beauty involves not only an acceptance of Kant's contradictions but an expansion of the concept as well. Beauty is not defined by rules and attributes (symmetry, harmony, variety within unity—Clive Bell's "significant form") but by its ability to qualitatively transform reality. Crispin Sartwell points the way to an expanded appreciation of Beauty in his book, *Six Names of Beauty*. Seeking to free the word "beauty" from its "cliché-ridden" contemporary usage, Sartwell relocates it in disparate cultures: beauty (English), the object of longing; *Yapha* (Hebrew), glow, bloom; *sundara* (Sanskrit), whole, holy; *to kalon* (Greek), idea, ideal; *wabi-sabi* (Japanese), humility, imperfection; and *hozho* (Navaho), health, harmony. Mechanical reproduction demanded a broader definition of art; it requires no less of Beauty.

Strangeness. Harold Bloom uses the term "strangeness" in lieu of the more common "originality." Strangeness is the type of originality that we can "never altogether assimilate." The concept of strangeness enriches the traditional notion of originality, adding the connotations of unpredictability, unknowability, and magic. To say that Jean Cocteau was original seems somehow thin; he was more than original, he was strange.[8] Originality is a prerequisite for the canon—the matter at hand must be expressed in a fresh way—but it is the addition of strangeness to originality that gives these works their enduring status. This strangeness, this unpredictable burst of originality, is the attribute of a work of art that causes successive generations to puzzle over it, to debate it, to be awed by it. Strangeness is the Romantic's term and Hegel's and everyone else's thereafter—until supplanted by the more recent "defamiliarization."

Unity of form and subject matter. It's hard to argue with this traditional yardstick of artistic value. "The greatness and excellence of art," Hegel states in *Aesthetics*, "will depend upon the degree of intimacy with which . . . form and subject matter are fused and united." Mechanically reproduced art greatly—and deliciously—complicates the possibilities of this unity. Motion pictures are multiform, juxtaposing real and artificial imagery, music, sound, decor, and acting styles to contrasting effect. Film does not have a "significant form," it has significant juxtapositions of form. Take, for example, Robert Bresson or David Lynch's juxtaposition of realistic decor and stylized acting. In architecture, form has been said to follow function; in film, form follows friction. These juxtapositions of form necessarily exist at any given moment during a film; in addition, over the course of the film, they evolve, fluctuate, metamorphose. The form of a film at the middle or end need not be the same as at the beginning. In judging a motion picture a critic judges the interplay of forms in relation to function (commercial, educational, aesthetic) and subject matter. In a "great" film the frictions of form join to express the function in a new, "strange" way. It's impossible to discuss the form of *The Rules of the Game* without also describing its subject matter.

Tradition. The criterion of tradition is most succinctly argued by T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead." Bloom picks up the argument in *The Western Canon*. "Tradition is not only a handing down or process of benign transmission," he writes, "it is also a conflict between past genius and present aspiration in which the prize is literary survival or canonical inclusion." This argument from history is particularly applicable in the fast-moving history of cinema. In a hundred years movies have redefined themselves a dozen times. Eliot spoke of "dead poets and artists." In film, the ancestors are barely dead, if that. It's not unusual for major filmmakers, shunted aside, to watch—some with admiration, some with anger—as their life's work is remade and redefined. The "agon" (to use Bloom's word) between film precursors and followers seems at times more simultaneous than sequential. One of the pleasures of film studies is stacking these filmmakers atop each other, seeing them reprocess their predecessors and fellow directors. Wong Kar Wai, for example, can be seen as first influenced by Scorsese and John Woo, passing through a phase influenced by Tarantino, and emerging as a great artist in a manner owed to Alain Resnais. The brief span of film history makes the task described by Eliot and Bloom more immediate. The greatness of a film or filmmaker must be judged not only on its own terms but by its place in the evolution of film.

Repeatability. Timelessness is the sine qua non of the canonical. Winckelmann, the father of art history, was motivated by the need to explain the timeless beauty of Greek art. This is basic—from Hume to Bloom all agree: great art "holds up," it can be experienced repeatedly, it can be appreciated by successive generations, it grows in importance and context

with time. This test has survived even the age of mechanical reproduction. A postcard of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* does not diminish the original; identical Eames chairs have the same integrity as a one-of-a-kind William Morris settee.

Films were not originally designed to "hold up." Movies were disposable commodities. Most early films have been lost for the simple reason that no one thought they were worth saving. Yet films do hold up—now more than ever. With the advent of videotape, DVDs, and downloadable digital files, films not only hold up, they thrive. Movies that were commercially unsuccessful in their initial theatrical releases (*Citizen Kane*, *Vertigo*, *The Searchers*) have become economic evergreens. The ability of certain films to retain their impact over repeat viewings is a textbook example of what makes a "classic." *Citizen Kane*, for example. There is nothing about it—cinematography, composition, editing, performances, sound effects—that hasn't been copied and recopied, seen by successive generations of filmgoers a thousand times. Yet, despite this, the fact remains that *Kane*, like all art that endures, engages both the first time and repeat viewer.

Viewer engagement. I'd like to add a film-specific criterion, one derived not from history but from the passivity of the filmgoing experience. A film viewer doesn't have to "do" anything. Music conjures images, theater demands the viewer to fill in the spaces, painting implies a world beyond the frame; film, by comparison, demands precious little. Everything is done for the audience: the information they receive and the emotions they feel are as pre-planned as a railway schedule. The primary appeal of the movies may be, in fact, that they ask so little of us. The viewer needs only sit and stare.[9] A great film is one that to some degree frees the viewer from this passive stupor and engages him or her in a creative process of viewing. The dynamic must be two-way. The great film not only comes at the viewer, it draws the viewer toward it. The film, either by withholding expected elements or by positing contradictions, causes the viewer to reach into the screen, as it were, and move the creative furniture around. This isn't a viewer trying to guess "Who done it?" This instead is a viewer making identifications he or she had no intention of making, coming to conclusions the film can't control, reassembling the film in a unique personal way. A great film, a film that endures, demands and receives the viewer's creative complicity.

Morality. I'm reluctant to introduce the oldest (and hoariest) artistic criterion, morality, a criterion that stretches from Plato (who equated aesthetic education and moral goodness) through Kant (the aesthetic as a path to moral goodness) to Ruskin and Leavis (every great work is a great moral work). It's not that I feel moral arguments have no place in the discussion of art, just that they are better implied than spelled out. Movies will always have a moral component. One can't depict real-life situations, develop characters, and tell stories over time without moral ramifications. To paraphrase the injunction Jung had inscribed on his gravestone, "Called or not, morality will be there." It makes sense that great films have great moral resonance. I just don't see the aesthetic value of setting one moral resonance against another. Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi documentary *Triumph of the Will* is arguably the quintessential motion picture, the fulcrum of the century of cinema, combining film's ability to document with its propensity for narrative, illustrating the new medium's emancipation of female artists, emblematizing the Marxist mix of art and aesthetics—of course, it's a work of moral resonance. Good or bad resonance? Most everyone would agree it's evil, but that's beside the point. The point is that no work that fails to strike moral chords can be canonical.

VIII.
RAISING THE BAR

Since my motive in proposing this film canon is to counter the proliferation of popularity-driven lists, the logical response is, "How high the bar?" My answer is, "The higher the better." Canons are by definition elitist enterprises. Film criticism, sunk in a bog of best-of polls (hundred best movie lines, hundred best movie songs, hundred best villains and heroes)[10] and awards beyond count or comprehension, beset by box-office gurus and per-screen averages, enthralled by explications of the obvious, treatises on trash, thumbs up, down—well, perhaps a little corrective elitism is in order.

Movies are, of course, a by-product of commerce. It costs money to make films. Prohibitive money. A filmmaker cannot take pen to paper or brush to easel with the freedom of a writer or painter. The economic imperative, in the history of the arts, is but a matter of degree. Artists from Pindar on have had to confront the profit motive. Film production is more expensive than paint and canvas; but, put in perspective, are the demands of a theatrical release more demanding than a papal commission? It would be interesting to hear what the filmmakers who complain about Harry Cohn or Harvey Weinstein would have to say when given notes by the Medicis. The symbiotic tie between cinema and commerce is no reason to judge movies by condescending standards. Great films have been and will continue to be made—often for the wrong reasons. "No great film," Godard commented, "is commercially successful for the right reason."

Other housekeeping issues: initially I'd decided to end my canon in 1975, approximately the time I began making films. That would not only provide a hedge against premature judgment but also free me from discussions of films whose inner workings I knew of or with which I'd had passing involvement. It's not possible to propose a canon of the century of cinema if one lops off the final quarter, so I guess I'm stuck. I'll carry the canon as close to the present as comfortable.

This discussion will limit itself to narrative feature films.

There are, of course, great documentary and experimental films, great short films as well; there are also films that blur the category between feature length and short form, narrative and documentary, as well as films that, like Matthew Barney's work, blur the distinction between movies and art installations. At some point one draws the line. *Cremaster 1* is not a narrative feature film. *Mulholland Drive* is.

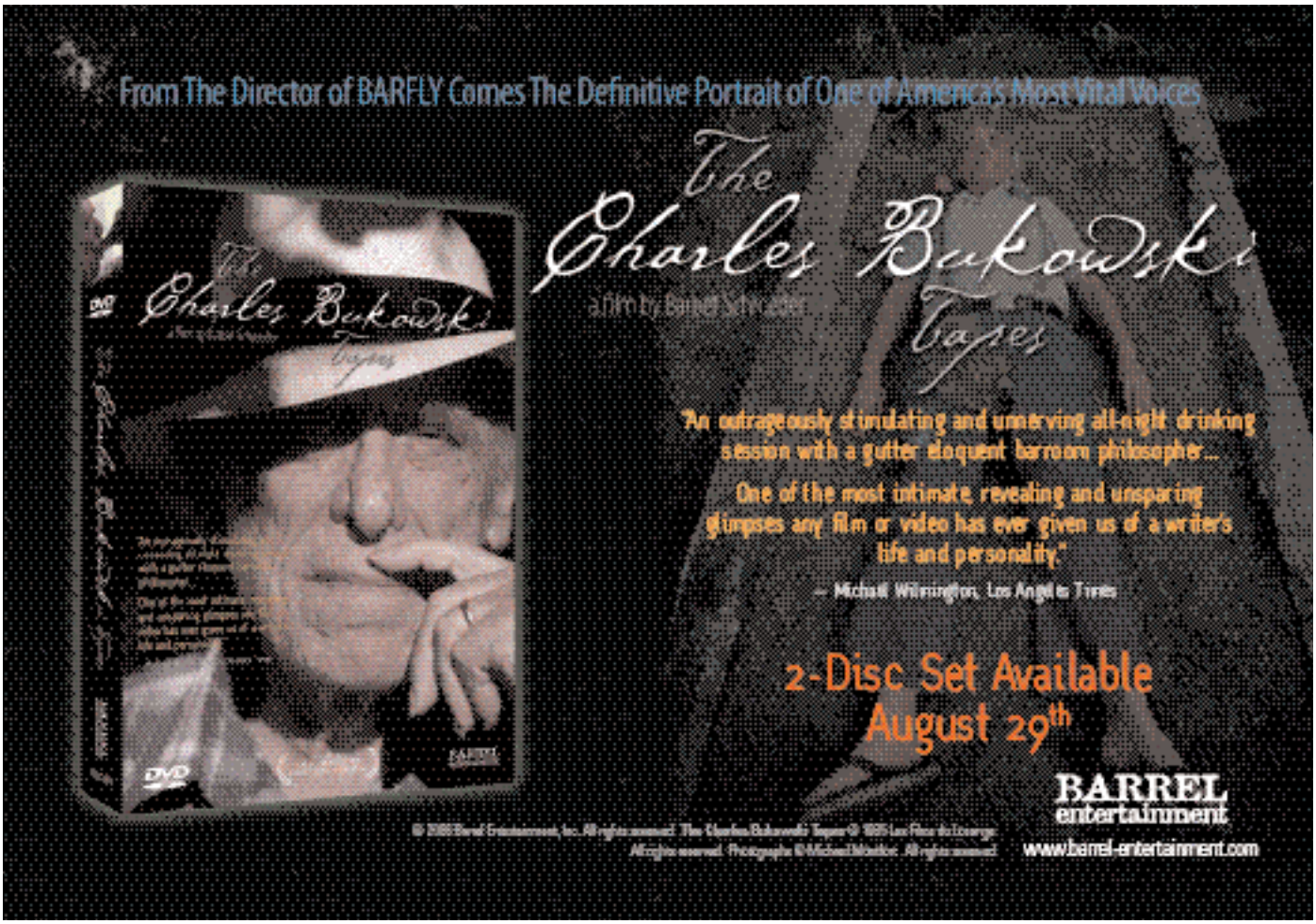
Just as the canon is not about commerce, neither is it about national identity or political correctness. There's no reason to balance money-losing films with commercially successful ones. Neither is there a reason to apportion canonical status according to year of release or country of origin. Film history, like art history, has fat and lean years, productive and fallow cultural environments. Genre and subject matter don't matter; nor do the age, race, and sex of the filmmakers. Such factors enrich the discussion; they don't define it. There is no equal-opportunity canon.

In addition, I'd like to concentrate on films, not filmmakers. Motion pictures are the most collaborative of the arts; perhaps this is why, as if in protest, there has been so much attention paid to film "auteurs." The film canon, however, consists of films, not people. A film may be the creation of one strong individual, it may be the product of several; in either case only the film can be judged. Chaplin's *City Lights* can be said, more than any other film, to be the product of a single individual; *The Conformist*, alternately, can be seen as the product of the visual troika of Bertolucci/Storaro/Scarfiotti. Is one more suited to the canon than the other? The merit of the film is the film itself.

Once one starts raising the bar, where do you stop? How elite is elite, how few too few? The answer is arbitrary. Abraham asked God to spare Sodom for the sake of 50 righteous people but quickly found himself negotiating down. At one point God agreed to save Sodom for the sake of 20, which seems a good compromise. So 20 films it is.

Where to begin? Bloom offers an interesting starting point in *The Western Canon*. If one could have only one author in the literary canon, he asks, who would it be? Without whom could such a canon not properly exist? The answer: Shakespeare. If one could have but one work by Shakespeare, which would it be? *Hamlet*. A literary canon is not conceivable, therefore, without *Hamlet*. Bloom begins his canon with a discussion of *Hamlet*, branching out from there.

For me the artist without whom there could not be a film canon is Jean Renoir, and the film without which a canon is inconceivable is *The Rules of the Game*.



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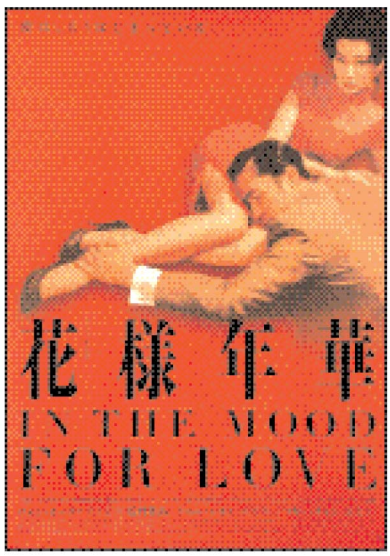

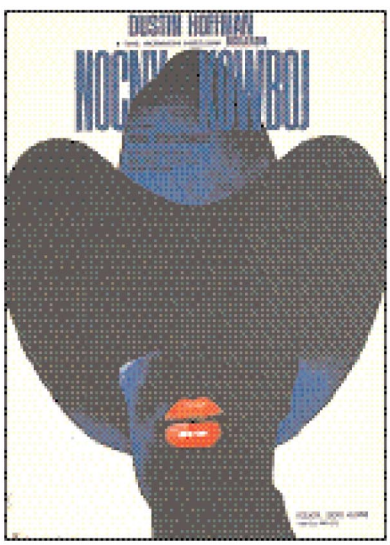

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APPENDIX
THE CANON

THE 20 FILMS I'D INTENDED TO write about (the "Gold" list) are listed below. Like Bloom, I've added subsequent lists: the Silver and the Bronze. I've also attached the names of the directors because, for the most part, these are films that bear the indelible imprint of the director. Movies are a collaborative medium, however, and one can never be sure of the creative interplay that creates the final film. Even the most dominant directors are indebted to their collaborators (loath as they are to admit it). What is Coppola's *The Godfather* without Mario Puzo, Welles's *Citizen Kane* without Gregg Toland, von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* without Marlene Dietrich? In some cases the influence of the collaborators upon the film is apparent: Odets and Lehman on *Sweet Smell of Success*, Warner Bros. on *Casablanca*. In others it must be ferreted out: von Harbou on *Metropolis*, Adolfo Bioy Casares on *Last Year at Marienbad*. The closest thing to a true auteur was Charles Chaplin—producer, director, writer, actor, editor, composer—but even The Tramp was influenced by the clowns who preceded him. In addition, I've listed one film per director, a choice that borders on the arbitrary. An equal case could be made for *My Darling Clementine* and *The Searchers*, *Diary of a Country Priest* and *Pickpocket*, *L'Avventura* and *La Notte*, *Annie Hall* and *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Autumn Sonata* and *Persona*, *Vertigo* and *Strangers on a Train*…

GOLD

1. **The Rules of the Game** Jean Renoir 1939
2. **Tokyo Story** Yasujiro Ozu 1953
3. **City Lights** Charles Chaplin 1931
4. **Pickpocket** Robert Bresson 1959
5. **Metropolis** Fritz Lang 1927
6. **Citizen Kane** Orson Welles 1941
7. **Orphée** Jean Cocteau 1950
8. **Masculin-Feminin** Jean-Luc Godard 1966
9. **Persona** Ingmar Bergman 1966
10. **Vertigo** Alfred Hitchcock 1958
11. **Sunrise** F.W. Murnau 1927
12. **The Searchers** John Ford 1956
13. **The Lady Eve** Preston Sturges 1941
14. **The Conformist** Bernardo Bertolucci 1970
15. **8 1/2** Federico Fellini 1963
16. **The Godfather** Francis Coppola 1972
17. **In the Mood for Love** Wong Kar Wai 2000
18. **The Third Man** Carol Reed 1949
19. **Performance** Donald Cammell/Nicolas Roeg 1970
20. **La Notte** Michelangelo Antonioni 1961

SILVER

21. **Mother and Son** Alexander Sokurov 1997
22. **The Leopard** Luchino Visconti 1963
23. **The Dead** John Huston 1987
24. **2001: A Space Odyssey** Stanley Kubrick 1968
25. **Last Year at Marienbad** Alain Resnais 1961
26. **The Passion of Joan of Arc** Carl Dreyer 1928
27. **Jules and Jim** Francois Truffaut 1962
28. **The Wild Bunch** Sam Peckinpah 1969
29. **All That Jazz** Bob Fosse 1979
30. **The Life of Oharu** Kenji Mizoguchi 1952
31. **High and Low** Akira Kurosawa 1963
32. **Sweet Smell of Success** Alexander Mackendrick 1957
33. **That Obscure Object of Desire** Luis Buñuel 1977
34. **An American in Paris** Vincente Minnelli 1951
35. **Voyage to Italy** Roberto Rossellini 1954
36. **Taxi Driver** Martin Scorsese 1976
37. **Ali: Fear Eats the Soul** Rainer Werner Fassbinder 1974
38. **Blue Velvet** David Lynch 1986
39. **Crimes and Misdemeanors** Woody Allen 1989
40. **The Big Lebowski** Joel Coen 1998

BRONZE

41. **The Red Shoes** Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger 1948
42. **Singin' in the Rain** Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly 1952
43. **Chinatown** Roman Polanski 1974
44. **The Crowd** King Vidor 1928
45. **Sunset Boulevard** Billy Wilder 1950
46. **Talk to Her** Pedro Almodóvar 2002
47. **Shanghai Express** Josef von Sternberg 1932
48. **Letter from an Unknown Woman** Max Ophüls 1948
49. **Once Upon a Time in the West** Sergio Leone 1968
50. **Salvatore Giuliano** Francesco Rosi 1962

51. **Nostalghia** Andrei Tarkovsky 1983
52. **Seven Men From Now** Budd Boetticher 1956
53. **Claire's Knee** Eric Rohmer 1970
54. **Earth** Alexander Dovzhenko 1930
55. **Gun Crazy** Joseph H. Lewis 1949
56. **Out of the Past** Jacques Tourneur 1947
57. **Children of Paradise** Marcel Carné 1945
58. **The Naked Spur** Anthony Mann 1953
59. **A Place in the Sun** George Stevens 1950
60. **The General** Buster Keaton 1927

ENDNOTES

[1]Pauline "Movie art . . . is not to be found in a return to official high culture" Kael would turn in her grave if she could read this defense of a film canon by her onetime protégé and disciple. I'm quoted on the jacket of *Going Steady*, the book which features "Trash, Art and the Movies," describing Pauline as "the Matthew Arnold of film criticism"—an absurd assessment that baffles me to this day. I remain indebted to her as a mentor, inspired by her as a writer, deeply fond of her as a person; but in the matter of trash, art, and the movies, she was simply wrong.

[2]The Harvard Classics Reading Guide quoted Emerson: "There are 850,000 volumes in the Imperial Library in Paris. If a man were to read industriously from dawn to dusk for sixty years, he would die in the first alcove. Would that same charitable soul . . . would name those which have been bridges or ships to carry him safely over dark morasses and barren oceans into the heart of sacred cities, into palaces and temples."

[3]Avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen set off a firestorm of controversy when he described the attack on the World Trade Center as the "greatest work of art of all time." He later qualified this by stating he meant "the designation 'work of art' to mean the work of destruction personified by Lucifer." But Stockhausen knew whereof he spoke. His own work expands the notions of musical and theatrical performance. In *Helikopter Streichquartett* (1993) a string quartet plays in a helicopter as it circles a concert hall, the sounds and images of the musicians as well as those of the helicopter beamed into the concert hall. A comparison of 9/11 and *Helikopter Streichquartett* as acts of artistic imagination seems very much a part of the current art debate.

[4]"Art world," a contemporary coinage, refers to all those whose interactions affect the valuations of art: critics, academics, curators, art dealers, aestheticians, etc.

[5]Bloom, interestingly, uses Giambattista Vico's 18th-century categorization of art into three phases: Theocratic (Classical through Renaissance), Aristocratic (Enlightenment), and Democratic (Romantic and Modern), to which he adds our current Chaotic Age and an impending New Theocratic Age. If Postart is the Chaotic Age then all we have to look forward to, according to Vico, is a new Theocracy of Art—not so far-fetched in light of recent events.

[6]Arthur Danto coined the term "artworld" in 1964 and wrote a 1984 essay entitled "The End of Art." In the pluralistic Postart period (Danto prefers "post-historical"), there will remain painting and art critics. The critic's task, however, Danto contends, is not to evaluate but to interpret the context of the art object and viewer—an argument I find is undermined when he uses freighted words like "better" and "more" in discussing art works.

[7]*The Critique of Judgment* defined the critical debate by contending that although there are no principles of Beauty, there are genuine judgments of Beauty—and that these judgments are universal.

[8]"Strange" is what Kant must have had in mind when he distinguished between the "original" and the "radically original." I find Bloom's term more evocative—and more useful.

[9]This, not surprisingly, was one of the first objections to moving pictures. French critic Louis Haugmard wrote in 1913 in *The Aesthetic of Cinematography*: "The charmed masses will learn to not think anymore, to resist all desire to reason and construct: they will know only how to open their large and empty eyes, only to look, look, look."

[10]These are real lists, compiled under the aegis of the American Film Institute. □

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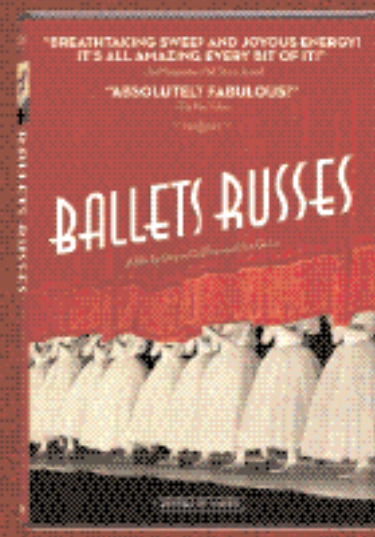

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